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Gilāna Sutta 1

Paṭhama Gilāna Sutta The First Discourse on the Ill | S 46.14

or, **(Mahā Kassapa) Gilāna Sutta** The Mahā Kassapa Discourse on the Ill

Theme: Mahā Kassapa's illness is overcome through reflecting on the awakening-factors

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2012

1 The saint's body

The Buddha and the arhats fall sick too. This is because their minds have awakened, but the body, being physical, remains impermanent and subject to the vagaries of the four elements,¹ both internal and external. Understandably, in this connection, the Buddha gives this mantra or reflection to the aged Nakula, pitā, “My body may be sick but my mind will not be sick.”²

In other words, the saints and the Buddha himself have feelings, especially bodily feelings (but no unwholesome mental feelings at all). **The Sekha Sutta** (M 53), for example, records how the Buddha feels back-pains while on a visit to Kapilavattu:

Then he said to the venerable Ānanda:

“Ānanda, speak to the Sakyas of Kapilavattu about the learner who has entered the way (to awakening) (*sekho pātipado*). My back is aching; I will rest it.” (M 53,5), SD 21.14

The Avassuta Pariyāya S (S 35.243) records that the Buddha, after saying, “My back aches, so I will stretch it,” and lies in the lion posture.³ Similarly, reports **the Naḷaka, pāna Sutta 1** (A 10.67), on another occasion, the Buddha, feeling his back aching, tells Sāriputta to instruct the assembly that is free from sloth and torpor.

In **the Nandaka Sutta** (A 9.4), however, the Buddha remarks to Nandaka that the latter's discourse is so lengthy that his (the Buddha's) back aches. Nandaka is reported to have felt embarrassed (*sārajjamāna, rūpa*)⁴ by this feedback. Apparently, Nandaka is not yet an arhat at this point. The Buddha then goes on to praise him with another discourse on the benefits of listening to the Dharma!⁵

In his last days, too, the Buddha shows symptoms of “severe illness,” probably dysentery. Although the pains are severe, “he endured all this mindfully and fully aware, and without complaining,” says **the Mahā, parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16).⁶ In short, even arhats and the Buddha tire,⁷ fall ill, and in, due course, die, that is to say they no more physically exist, but beyond that, we cannot really in any meaningful way speak of whether they exist or not after death.⁸

In later post-Buddha Buddhism, where the view that “everything” is actually enlightened, and it's just that our enlightened minds do not see this, such historical details of the lives of the Buddha and the early arhats become meaningless to such scholastics. They then regarded the Buddha and other holy figures as being free from sickness. Such a situation is of course possible in a mythical or cosmic scenario, where we are no more held back by the early teachings of the Buddha. A singular problem with such views is that they present a Buddhism that is simply unrelated to our daily lives and our meditative practices.⁹

¹ On the 4 elements, see **Mahā Rāhul'ovāda S** (M 62,8-11) & SD 3.11 (4).

² *Ātura, kāyassa me sato cittaṃ anāturaṃ bhavissati.* (M 22.1,4/3:1), SD 43.11.

³ S 35.143,8/4:184,8. Cf SA 1:78; UA 403; VbhA 345.

⁴ On *sārajjamāna, rūpa*, see Sd 28.9a*3.2).

⁵ A 9.4,2/4:359 = SD 73.4.

⁶ D 16,4.20+2.23 = SD 9.

⁷ See SD 32.6 (2.4): Even arhats tire.

⁸ On the quadrilemma of the saint's posthumous state, see eg **Aggi Vaccha, gotta S** (M 72,9-12) & SD 6.15 (3.2)

⁹ For a more detailed study, see **A notion of diṭṭhi**, SD 40a.1.

2 Reciting the awakening-factors

2.1 The Gilāna Suttas 1-3 (S 46.14-16) deal with the same subject—the illness of arhats—but with a different individual in each case, thus:

		<u>The ill</u>	<u>Attended by</u>
Gilāna Sutta 1	S 46.14	Mahā Kassapa	the Buddha
Gilāna Sutta 2	S 46.15	Moggallāna	the Buddha
Gilāna Sutta 3	S 46.16	The Buddha	Mahā Cunda

All three Suttas locate the occasion in the same venue: the squirrels' feeding-ground in the Bamboo Grove.

2.2 All the three Suttas have the same structure. The indisposed saint is identified; someone visits him and asks after him. The ill speaks of his physical discomfort and the visitor recites the 7 awakening-factors to him. The ill then recovers. Since this is a popular “protective” (*paritta*) chant in the lay Buddhism of south Asia (especially those of the Sinhala tradition), the Pali texts are reproduced here. First, here is “paritta” section of **the Sutta version**:¹⁰

Satt'ime boj्jhaṅgā bhagavatā samma-d-akkhātā bhāvitā bahulīkatā abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṁvattanti.

Katame satta.

(1) *Sati*, *samboj्jhaṅgo kho bhagavatā samma-d-akkhātā bhāvitā bahulīkatā abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṁvattati*

(2) *Dhamma.vicaya*, *samboj्jhaṅgo kho bhagavatā samma-d-akkhātā bhāvitā bahulīkatā abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṁvattati.*

(3) *Viriya*, *samboj्jhaṅgo kho bhagavatā samma-d-akkhātā bhāvitā bahulīkatā abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṁvattati.*

(4) *Pīti*, *samboj्jhaṅgo kho bhagavatā samma-d-akkhātā bhāvitā bahulīkatā abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṁvattati.*

(5) *Passaddhi*, *samboj्jhaṅgo kho bhagavatā samma-d-akkhātā bhāvitā bahulīkatā abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṁvattati.*

(6) *Samādhi*, *samboj्jhaṅgo kho bhagavatā samma-d-akkhātā bhāvitā bahulīkatā abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṁvattati.*

(7) *Upekkhā*, *samboj्jhaṅgo kho bhagavatā samma-d-akkhātā bhāvitā bahulīkatā abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṁvattati.*

Ime kho satta boj्jhaṅgā bhagavatā samma-d-akkhātā bhāvitā bahulīkatā abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṁvattantīti.

These seven awakening-factors have been well pointed out by the Blessed One. When cultivated, much developed, they bring about direct knowledge, self-awakening, nirvana.

What are the seven?

(1) The awakening-factor that is **mindfulness**, when cultivated, much developed, they bring about direct knowledge, self-awakening, nirvana.

(2) The awakening-factor that is **dharma-investigation**, when cultivated, much developed, they bring about direct knowledge, self-awakening, nirvana.

(3) The awakening-factor that is **effort**, when cultivated, much developed, they bring about direct knowledge, self-awakening, nirvana.

(4) The awakening-factor that is **zest**, when cultivated, much developed, they bring about direct knowledge, self-awakening, nirvana.

(5) The awakening-factor that is **tranquillity**, when cultivated, much developed, they bring about direct knowledge, self-awakening, nirvana.

(6) The awakening-factor that is **samadhi**, when cultivated, much developed, they bring about direct knowledge, self-awakening, nirvana.

(7) The awakening-factor that is **equanimity**, when cultivated, much developed, they bring about direct knowledge, self-awakening, nirvana.

These are the seven awakening-factors that have well pointed out by the Blessed One. When cultivated, much developed, they bring about direct knowledge, self-awakening, nirvana.

¹⁰ **Gilāna S 1-3** (S 46.14-16) are listed respectively as nos 17-19 in **Catu,bhāṅvāra,pāli** of Sinhala Buddhism: see L Lokuliyana, *Sinhala Maha Pirit Pota*, nd: ix. On the nature and benefits of paritta chanting, see Piyasilo, *Buddhist Prayer*, 1990c:73-98.

The popular **Bojjhaṅga Paritta**¹¹ is an abridgement of the three Suttas, recited as follows:

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| <p>1 <i>Bojjhaṅgo sati, saṅkhāto
dhammānaṃ vicayo tathā
viriyam, pīti, passaddhi
bojjhaṅgā ca tathāpare</i></p> | <p>The awakening-factors comprising mindfulness, then, dharma-investigation, effort, zest, tranquillity, and another awakening-factor, that is,</p> |
| <p>2 <i>samādh'upekkha, bojjhaṅgā
satte te sabba, dassinā
muninā samma-d-akkhātā
bhāvitā bahulī, katā</i></p> | <p>the awakening-factors that are samadhi and equanimity. These seven, by the all-seeing one, the sage, has been well pointed out, when cultivated, made much of,</p> |
| <p>3 <i>saṃvattanti abhiññāya
nibbānāya ca bodhiyā
etena saccena vajjena
sothhi te <me> hotu sabbadā</i></p> | <p>brings about direct knowledge, awakening in nirvana. By the power of this truth, may you <I> be well always!</p> |
| <p>4 <i>Ekasmim samaye nātho
moggallānaṃ ca kassapaṃ
gilāne dukkhite disvā
bojjhaṅge satta desayi</i></p> | <p>Once, the lord [the refuge], seeing that Moggallāna and Kassapa, too, were sick and in pain, taught the seven awakening-factors.</p> |
| <p>5 <i>Te ca abhinanditvā
rogā muccīmsu taṃ khāṇe
etena sacca vajjena
sothhi te <me> hotu sabbadā</i></p> | <p>And, they, rejoicing, at once, is freed from their illness. By the power of this truth, may you <I> be well always!</p> |
| <p>6 <i>Ekadā dhamma, rājā pi
gelaññenābhipīlito
cunda-t, therena tañ, ñeva
bhanāpetvāna sādaraṃ</i></p> | <p>Once, the kind of truth himself was afflicted with illness. The elder Cunda himself, with deep regard, recited this (teaching).</p> |
| <p>7 <i>sammoditvā ca ābādhā
tamhā vuṭṭhāsi thānaso
etena sacca vajjena
sothhi te <me> hotu sabbadā</i></p> | <p>The Buddha, rejoicing, recovers from that illness at once. By the power of this truth, may you <I> be well always!</p> |
| <p>8 <i>pahīnā te ca ābādhā
tiṇṇannam pi mahesinaṃ
magg'āhata, kilesā'va
pattānuppatti, dhammataṃ¹²
etena sacca vajjena
sothhi te <me> hotu sabbadā</i></p> | <p>These illnesses were dispelled from the three great seers, just as defilements destroyed by the path attains the nature of non-arising. By the power of this truth, may you <I> be well always!</p> |

¹¹ This paritta does not appear in a list of parittas at Miln 150 f or Vism 13.31/414. This could mean that the Bojjhaṅga Paritta was added into the traditional paritta list just after Buddhaghosa (Vism author) but before Dhammapāla (the Udāna Commentary compiler), who quotes it by name and quotes **Gilāna S 1** (on Mahā Kassapa) (S 46.14) (UA 60 f).

¹² This difficult line has been rendered as “attained accomplishment in the nature (essence) of the Dhamma” (Piyadassi, *The Book of Protection*, 1999:138) and as “can arise no more” (*Chanting Book* of the Samatha Trust, 2008:78). Both translations are incomplete in some way, although the latter is closer to the Pali.

The First Discourse on the Ill

S 46.14

1 At one time, the Blessed One was staying in the squirrels' feeding-ground in the Bamboo Grove near Raja,gaha.

Mahā Kassapa lays ill

2 Now at that time, the venerable Mahā Kassapa was residing in the Pippali Cave.¹³ He was sick, in pain, gravely ill.

3 Then, in the evening, having emerged from his solitary retreat, the Blessed One went up to the venerable Mahā Kassapa and sat down at the seat that had been laid out.

4 Thus seated the Blessed One said this to the venerable Mahā Kassapa,
 “How are you, Kassapa? I hope you are bearing up, and getting better. I hope that your painful feelings are subsiding, that their subsiding is evident, not their rising.”¹⁴ [80]

4.1 “I cannot bear it, bhante; I’m not getting better; my painful feelings are not subsiding, but rising; their rising is evident, not their subsiding.”¹⁵

The 7 awakening-factors

5¹⁶ “These seven awakening-factors, Kassapa, have been well pointed out by me. When cultivated, much developed, they bring about direct knowledge, self-awakening, nirvana.

What are the seven?

- (1) The awakening-factor that is mindfulness *sati sambojjhaṅga*
 has been well pointed out by me.
 When cultivated, much developed, bring about direct knowledge, self-awakening, nirvana.
- (2) The awakening-factor that is dharma-investigation *dhamma,vicaya sambojjhaṅga*
 has been well pointed out by me.
 When cultivated, much developed, bring about direct knowledge, self-awakening, nirvana.
- (3) The awakening-factor that is effort *virīya sambojjhaṅga*
 has been well pointed out by me.
 When cultivated, much developed, bring about direct knowledge, self-awakening, nirvana.
- (4) The awakening-factor that is zest *pīti sambojjhaṅga*
 has been well pointed out by me.
 When cultivated, much developed, bring about direct knowledge, self-awakening, nirvana.
- (5) The awakening-factor that is tranquillity *passaddhi sambojjhaṅga*
 has been well pointed out by me.

¹³ “Pippali cave,” Be Ee Se *pippali,guhāyaṃ*; Ce *pippali,guhāyaṃ*. *Pippali* or *pippalī* (Skt *pippali*, see Geiger, *Pali Grammar*, §62), also *pippala*; Gr πῆπερι = Lat piper = Eng pepper, Ger. pfeffer) long pepper, *Piper longum* (S 5:79; U 1.4; J 3:85; Vv 43.6; DhA 1:258, 4:155; UA 59. P Masefield renders it as “Pepper Den” (UA:M 96,9). Botanical details: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Long_pepper.

¹⁴ *Kacci te kassapa khamāṇīyaṃ kacci yāpaṇīyaṃ kacci dukkhā vedanā paṭikkamanti no abhikkhamanti, patikkamo, sānam paññāyati no abhikkamo’ti*, lit “Kassapa, perhaps you are bearing it, perhaps you can keep going; that your pains are subsiding, not rising; that their subsiding is evident, not their rising.” This is stock. Comy glosses *sānam* as *etesam*, “their” (*paṭikkamosānan’ti paṭikkamo etesam*, SA 2:313). The underscored phrase lit tr “perhaps you are fit to keep going.” I have rendered this as “How are you?” and place it at the head of the sentence for the sake of acceptable English.

¹⁵ *Na me bhante khamāṇīyaṃ, na yāpaṇīyaṃ, baḷhā me dukkhā vedanā abhikkhamanti no paṭikkamanti, abhikkamosānam paññāyati no paṭikkamoti*. This is stock: **Dhānañjāni S** (M 97.29/2:193,1), SD 4.9, **Anātha,-piṇḍik’ovāda S** (M 143.4/3:259,8); **Phagguna S** (A 6.56/3:379,25), SD 23.4.

¹⁶ Ee wrongly number this as “4” and so on.

When cultivated, much developed, bring about direct knowledge, self-awakening, nirvana.

- (6) The awakening-factor that is mental concentration *samādhi sambojjhaṅga*
has been well pointed out by me.

When cultivated, much developed, bring about direct knowledge, self-awakening, nirvana.

- (7) The awakening-factor that is equanimity *upekkhā sambojjhaṅga*
has been well pointed out by me.

When cultivated, much developed, bring about direct knowledge, self-awakening, nirvana.

These, Kassapa, are the seven awakening-factors have been well pointed out by me. When cultivated, much developed, they bring about direct knowledge, self-awakening, nirvana.”

5.2 “Indeed, Blessed One, they are awakening-factors! Indeed, well-gone one [sugata], they are awakening-factors!”

Mahā Kassapa is healed

6 The Blessed One said this.

The venerable Mahā Kassapa joyfully approved of the Blessed One’s word.

And the venerable Mahā Kassapa recovered from his illness. In this way was the venerable Mahā Kassapa’s illness abandoned.

— evaṃ —

130923; 131218